

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DECATUR COUNTY

Vol. 5 , No. 113      Greensburg, Indiana      January 1988

OCCASION:    Twenty-ninth Annual  
                 Dinner Meeting

DATE:           Saturday, Jan. 23,  
                 1988 at 6:30 P.M.

DINNER:       Ladies of the Presby-  
                 terian Church. The  
                 Dinner is \$5.00 each.  
                 Please reserve by  
                 check. Send it to  
                 Ruth McClintic, 632  
                 W. 1st. St., Greensburg,  
                 IN. The deadline is  
                 the evening of Jan. 20.

PROGRAM:    The entertainment of  
                 the evening is entitled "Mountain  
                 Men". Victor Fields, a college  
                 teacher at Columbus will be the  
                 entertainer. He will not only  
                 tell us about the famous mountain  
                 men of the early 1800's, but he will  
                 act out the times & doings by dress  
                 and demonstrations. This will be  
                 new and different, don't miss it.

VETERAN MEMORIAL

The Downtown Greensburg Develop-  
ment Corp. is in the process of  
raising funds to give the Square  
a facelift. New sidewalks out-  
lined with red brick, landscaping,  
and street lights will be a part  
of this project. A very important  
part will be the Veterans Memorial  
Walk. The V.F.W. wants to honor  
the Veterans of Decatur County by  
placing a White Marble Brick in  
the brick sidewalk engraved with  
name, war, and year died for each  
veteran who died in the service.  
Anyone wishing to honor a fallen  
veteran may sponsor a Memorial  
Brick, cost of each brick is \$30.  
Make check to: Downtown Greens-  
burg Development Corp. Mail to:  
Art Meyerrose, Com. V.F.W. Post  
5584, 6 Skyline Dr., Greensburg,  
Indiana 47240.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Phil Oldham, Versailles  
Marylin Burton  
Allen County Public Library  
Mr. & Mrs. Howard Goddard  
John R. Stonebreaker

MEMORIAL

In memory of Louise Clements by  
Teresa Volk.

Gift To Society  
Marylin Burton

FALL TOUR - A bus load of society  
members enjoyed a trip to Shelby-  
vill to see the sights. They  
were escorted around the county  
museum, called the Grover Museum,  
by the curator, Gary Henry.  
Henry is a paid curator, a pro-  
fessional. Then, they toured  
the historical sites of the city.  
Mary Ann Creed, a member of the  
local historical society was in  
charge of this part of the after-  
noon. An interesting trip and  
a fine day for it.

1988 DUES

DUES OF \$5.00 PER PERSON ARE DUE  
JANUARY 1st. THESE DUES ARE FOR  
THE COMING YEAR OF 1988.  
You may send your check in care  
of Peg Miller, P.O. Box 163,  
Greensburg, IN. 47240. THANK YOU.

RELATIONSHIP

If you're needing to know the difference  
between a second cousin, and a first  
cousin once removed, I can tell you---  
and only because I have a little chart  
printed long, long ago that gives the  
information. Never can remember what  
the chart says, but it does help to  
settle confusion. Your "first cousin  
once removed" is the child of your first  
cousin. Your "second cousin" is the  
child of your father or mother's first  
cousin. Now if these relationships are  
by marriage, you tack "in-law" onto the  
cousin. Of course, you can go back even  
farther, but its much simpler just to  
call those "kissin cousins" and be  
done with it.

About the St. Omer School

Respected Friends:

Perhaps this brief statement of affairs or condensed history of school may interest some of you at least, of so the object sought is accomplished. As some of you are aware I came to this place one year ago the seventh of January. And I must confess that the dilapidated appearance of our town and the staring degraded looks of some of its inhabitants, caused me to lament and reflect as to what kind of society I was about to make my residence with. The ensuing morning I went I gave vent to my feelings by taking a good cry, and asked Mr. Pierce to release me from the position which I was about to occupy. He replied that he desired me to remain and said that he thought that I would be better satisfied, I had become acquainted--and raised my wages to induce me to remain. I finally became reconciled to my fate.

So we began our first term of school at this place on the ninth of January and under rather discouraging circumstances. School house being unfinished, plastering damp, no recitation benches, no window blinds & everything in a very inconvenient condition. The first thing in order was a regular examination of pupils which consumed the most of the first week. The number coming under my jurisdiction or command was 68 & the number enrolled in the department was 33. Next thing was to adapt rules & regulations most suitable to secure good order, prompt attendance, the necessary decorum & everything that pertained to the interest of the school in general. To enforce the same caused considerable trouble & vexation. We toiled, corrected, reproved, used moral persuasion, gave tickets, praised when commendable, encouraged & tried to the best of our ability to inculcate good & correct moral principles. We consoled ourselves with the old adage "that a bad beginning makes a good ending".

Pupils began to take an interest in their studies, progressed finely, everything appeared to assume a different appearance & we felt encouraged and thought the prospect was rather favorable for this school to become one of the best schools in the Township, notwithstanding its disadvantages & we flattered ourselves or hoped at least that the worst was over. But alas! How vain our earthly hopes. In an hour when we least expected we were called to witness one of the most heart-rending & awful tragedies that was ever recorded in the annals of an enlightened & civilized community. My fellow teacher former Principal of this school, a man esteemed by all who knew him, one who stood high in the estimation of his pupils, one who could not permit his pupils consciently to use infamous language, degrade themselves & establish a precedent in the school which was calculated to injure the offender & ruin the school. After resorting to moral persuasion giving the offender over to his Father for correcting but all in vain, while in the discharge of his duty when all other means had failed he was assassinated in a most horrible & brutal manner about ten o'clock Wednesday morning February 7, 1866. Oh, words fail me to picture the scene which I was forced to witness. I rushed to his assistance, but how I got there is more than I can account for.



He was prostrate upon the floor & by our united effort he rose partially up, while in that position he opened his eyes. I never shall forget the look he gave me & the grasp of his hand. The blood gushing from his wound over both of us, children screaming at the top of their voices. The larger pupils came to his assistance as soon as they could get down stairs & the screams soon brought the people of the village. They took him to Mr. Hafer's where he expired the same day between three & four o'clock. Picture in your own minds the scene at this time. For I confess language fails me to do the occasion justice from the gray haired Father & Mother down to the little child the most intense grief was apparent. Next day it was thought best to remove the remains to St. Paul. Arrangements were made for our pupils and Mr. Sculls to form in a procession & march through town.

His aged & about broken-hearted Father & Mother had just arrived there. As soon as they became a little composed they came to the church where the last tribute of respect or funeral of their son's was preached by Rev. Roberts. Next day his parents took his remains home with them to Peru for interment.

We returned to our homes & everything seemed lonely and mournful. The question AROSE what was to be done for the continuation of the school. It was thought best to call a meeting & accordingly we assembled at the once lively & cheerful school room, now draped in mourning, to unite our effort & devise the best means for the continuation of said school. The patrons seemed determined not to let the school go down if they could possibly avoid it. Therefore resolved that if I left them they were ruined forever. Through sympathy & respect I had for some of the patrons & the interest I felt in the school I determined to stand by them & exert all my influence in behalf of the school. Although it appeared almost impossible for me ever to go back to that room again. The patrons desired me to take charge of the school by a unanimous vote. They preferred to bear my expense if I would select & secure a teacher to fill the vacancy. I complied with their request & went & obtained a teacher, one whom I had been acquainted with for years and thought I would be safe in recommending as being worthy & competent to fill the vacancy. Some may inquire why I did not select a young man. I am prepared to answer that question. Had an offer to a young man services & of course it would of been my preference if I had no object in view but my own personal interest, but such was not-- The care, the interest of the school was the object sought & what I knew of the scholars & vicinity I thought a man of a family would do more to promote the interest of the school & vicinity.

As a school we persevere to rank equal if not superior to any of our neighboring village schools. Although we have poverty, insufficient pay & all kinds of trouble imaginable to contend with, yet under the circumstances we have done the best we could. We have had little sympathy seemingly & sometimes feel like giving up in despair. But we are confident that we are battling in a good cause. With consciences void of offence toward God & hope of the future buoys us up and we still battle on.

\* \* \* \* \*

LET'S NOT FORGET

by:

William Parker

At the turn of the century the Civil War had been over for thirty five years, so many veterans were active in the affairs of our country both political and business and were also a very patriotic group. They were very loyal to the veterans organization the Grand Army of the Republic, the G.A.R., and the auxiliary the Women's Relief Corp. the W.R.C.. Our local post The Pap Thomas Post # 5, named for General Pap Thomas, was located in a large upstairs room in the Greely Robbins building next to my fathers office, now the home of Hunter's Pharmacy. The room was never locked so I spent considerable time browsing around in the room which always fascinated me. The charter on the wall, a large black and white picture of the Andersonville Prison, a painting of Pap Thomas for whom the post was named and many other pictures and relics. At the demise of the post these articles were moved to the first Decatur County Museum on the third floor of the old West High School. When this museum was disbanded these articles were sold to an antique dealer out of the county. They would surely be very welcome to our museum today. The most important day of the year, as now, was Decoration Day, now Memorial Day. They seemed to all turn out. Their room and sidewalk in front of the building was crowded with veterans. The main event of the day was the march to the soldiers circle at South Park Cemetery, led by a band and fife and drum corps, where a memorial was held for their fallen comrades, a custom that has been followed for over a hundred years, and I hope always will be.

As one war's veterans pass on, another group seems always ready to take over. My group, the Veterans of World War One, has declined from over a hundred and twenty five members to less than fifteen in just a few years, few less than ninety years of age. World War Two took over for us several years ago. The G.A.R. Post # 5 was established at Greensburg on July 2, 1879, under the auspices of the Illinois Department, Indiana not organized then, so should have been #1 instead of #5. It had 35 charter members and has had over 500 members on their roster over the years. The Grand Army has had 6 Posts in Decatur County, Greensburg, New Point, St. Paul, Westport, Sardinia and Clarksburg. Death fast claiming the old Veterans, the Greensburg Post has only 71 members. Westport is the only other post left in the county by 1915.

Among the Veterans I remember was Henry Thompson, who lived over on East Street just back of our home on Franklin Street. Henry was shot through the breast at Winchester and lost a leg at the Wilderness and eventually lived to an old age. He made his own legs out of willow wood and was known as Peg Leg Thompson. He and his wife Ella were very nice people and often visited back and forth with my parents; Alonzo Murphy, who lived in the house at the end of Franklin Stree, Almon S. Creath a Justice of the Peace in Greensburg for many years; J.N. Annis and Reuben Smalley who wore a Medal of Honor conferred upon him by Congress for distinguished bravery in the siege of Vicksburg. He was the only living soldier in the County with such a medal and one of the few in our county who had been a recipient of the Congressional Medal



of Honor. I wonder where it is now.

I would like to include another item I found in Hardings History, which I did not know, any maybe few others have seen it all through their lives.

On May 10, 1897, the local Grand Arm of the Republic received a thirty two pound cannon which was donated by the government. It was shipped to Greensburg from Portsmouth, Main, and the Post had to pay the freight charge of thrity one dollars. It now stands in the soldier circle in South Park Cemetery, and is flanked by the fifty three pound balls which came with it. Major M.D. Tackett and Captain Silas F. Rigby had charge of the placing of the cannon in its present location. The last of this article is mostly copied from Hardings History of 1915, and is available to everyone.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### CELEBRATED 92nd BIRTHDAY

Down in the central part of Kentucky, in Madison county, there was born in the year 1810, on July 7, James W. Magee, the subject of this sketch. He was the oldest of a family of nine children and now the only one living. His parents were very poor and he was compelled to work very hard for a living as soon as he was large enough to turn his hand to some useful occupation. Indeed, before he was three years old, we find him and another tot, sitting at either end of a drawing machine and pulling out the names of the unfortunate ones who are to go into the army in the war of 1812 for the draft. The name of one cowardly fellow is drawn and he bellows like a calf, something not characteristic of the true Kentuckian, when the fellow's bellowing is stopped by the elder Magee, who volunteers to take the drafted man's place in the army. But before the drafted men can be sent to the front, word is received of the end of the war.

Young Magee grew up to manhood in Kentucky and worked at the carpentering business for some time. One day his father came to where he was at work and told him that he wanted him to go over into Indiana and rent a house in the neighborhood of the Clemon's schoolhouse on the Michigan road which has just been laid out. The young man did as his father requested him to do and rented a log house near the site of of school house mentioned. He put a new roof on the cabin and started back to the Dark and Bloody Ground, but met his father and mother and family enroute to the new home. His mother was very much discouraged at the outlook and persuaded James to return with them. He did so. In a few years, he was married to Mary Ann Clemons. To this union were born seven children, none of whom are now alive, but several of these grew to be adults before crossing to the great unknown.

The second wife was Emeline Smith. This union occured in 1851 and the result was nine children, nearly all of whom are still living.

When James Magee and Mary Ann Clemons were first married they began house-keeping in a cabin in the woods. He cleared off the forrest and planted his truck patch and the outlook was favorable for nothing more than hard work and poor living. One day while wielding a grubbing hoe is the slashes on the banks of the Muscatatack in the south part of Saltcreek Township, preparatory to the planting of some turnip seed, his father-in-law rode up in front of the clearing and hailed him.

"James", said he, "I've sold you out".

"Have you," was the reply of the young man, "then I'll not strike another lick at these grubs."

The place where young Magee was living belonged to Mr. Clemons and he informed the young man and his bride that he had traded it off and intended to give them an 80 acre tract of land west of Greensburg about two miles in the black swamp. The news was hailed with delight. The father-in-law was invited in to dinner. He unloaded the deer which lay across the pommel of his saddle, and a most happy meal was indulged in.

Soon they were located at the new home west of Greensburg. A neighbor came in one day and after looking meditatively at the puncheon floor a few moments, remarked to Mr. Magee that he never could stand to live there on account of the ague. He said that the family that had lived there last year had shook and shook until they were compelled to leave. But Mr. Magee stuck to the swamp and strange to say he never had a touch of the ague, even.

One time when he had a log rolling, his father-in-law brought him a jug of whiskey to be used on the occasion. When the work had all been finished about a gallon of the liquor remained. The young pioneer, thinking of ague and snakebites, went to the woods and got a lot of bark, dogwood, oak, poplar, mulberry, butternut, and several other kinds and put into the whiskey for bitters. And it was bitter with a vengeance. Every morning, he and his wife would take a tablespoon of the nauseous stuff and thus warded off the chills and fever, for they never came.

When asked if there were any deer or bear or other large game in the country when he came here, Mr. Magee replied that there were deer and wild turkeys in abundance, but that he never had time to hunt deer and he never saw one in the forests, except one time when he saw a little fawn that sprang up among the bushes in the slashes of Saltcreek and ran away. After the animal got off a few rods, it stopped and turned its head and he fired at it with his old flintlock musket. The little thing tumbled over, when when he approached to pick it up, it jumped up and ran away and that was the last of it so far as he was concerned.

One time when living on the 80 acres in the black swamp, Mrs. Magee saw a flock of wild turkeys light in the corn patch near the cabin. She called her husband and again the old flintlock was brought into play and this time it did its work well. An old gobbler, the king of the flock, hopped up on the fence or a stump -- he was a monstrous bird, and when the flintlock cracked, the old gobbler king laid down the burdens of his life and his juicy carcass was sweet eating for many a long day. Mrs. Magee boned Mr. Turkey, sliced the breast, and when the meat was all placed in the new half bushel measure, it filled it to the top. When some of those juicy slices of salted turkey breast were placed in the skillet and cooked in butter, then eaten with corn bread and washed down with sweet milk, ah, what finer eating could you imagine now, let alone the time when it was a rarity to have wheat bread once a week and then only in soda biscuits for breakfast Sunday morning.

James W. Magee, in those days in the 30's and early 40's would sometimes ride four or five miles or more to get a days work. For this work he received fifty cents and when a half dollar had thus been earned, by the real sweat of the brow, he would the next day mount his trusty horse and set out up to an old farmer's on Flat Rock who had a pen of corn that had been snapped off. Mr. Magee would husk and shell a bushell of this corn, pay for it the .50¢ which he had earned the day before and then start for the mill to have it ground. If he got home before midnight, he did well.

The history of the trials and difficulties of James W. Magee and his first wife is the history of many another. They conquered the wilderness. They cleared up the forest. They drained the great black swamps. Fruitful fields and



bountiful crops came and with the years of toil and sacrifice came the success of the pioneers. They worked through rain and sunshine. They had no half holidays. Too busy to hunt deer although there were plenty of them in the swamps and slashes.

The poet has well said:       The pioneer was a rugged seer,  
                                      As he crossed the Western River,  
                                      Where the Copper-man called the Indian  
                                      Lay hid with his bow and quiver.

There were no Indians in Decatur County when James W. Magee came here, but they had not long been gone. When the Magees gave up their "Old Kentucky Home" to come to the wilderness in Indiana to help carve civilization out of the savage life that there abounded, they did what they felt called upon to do. The elder Magee was a Baptist preacher and was a sincere man. His son James followed in his footsteps. He wrought and labored and did the work that came to his hand and did it without grumbling or shirking. He was never a member of any church, but believes in immersion, is a great bible reader and has always been a model man in words and deeds. He was the father of sixteen children, and they (those who lived) grew to manhood and womanhood, and became honored and respected citizens.

Last Sunday, James Washington Magee celebrated the completion of his 91st year in life. What wondrous changes have taken place since he first saw Greensburg. Then the town only reached to the Baptist Church on the north and all southwest of the square was a skating rink in winter and a frog pond in summer.

The men who hewed down the forests and ditched out the great swamps of Indiana are fast passing away, indeed, they have nearly all gone. Some day soon the bells will ring out the passing of James W. Magee, but who will not say; -- "He has finished the work; he has kept the faith; enter thou into they reward."

The above article was published in the Greensburg New Era.

Written by: Jesse Rucker

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## MEMBERSHIPS and MEMORIALS

Historical Society of Decatur County, Inc.  
P.O. Box 163 Greensburg, IN. 47240

Yearly Membership \$5.00                      Payable by January 1st. ,  
Life Membership \$100.00

☒ Renewal        ☐ New                      ☐ Gift        ☐ Life

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

IF GIFTS: From \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

### MEMORIALS

In Memory of \_\_\_\_\_ Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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# SOCIETY'S OFFICERS

President.....Morgan Miers  
RR # 4, Greensburg  
Phone: 663-5071  
1st. V. Pres.....Bill Hunter  
2nd. V. Pres.....Readawn Metz  
Rec. Sec.....Juanita Beall  
Cor. Sec.....Peg Miller  
Treas.....Ruth McClintic

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# EDITOR OF BULLETIN

Van P. Batterton  
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Greensburg, IN. 47240

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Allan Beall  
Marjorie Hunter  
John Oliger

# MUSEUM CURATOR

Jackie Mendenhall  
663-8277

# MUSEUM VOLUNTEERS

Lee Lauderdale  
663-2769

# SOCIETY'S AGENT

William H. Robbins

# COUNTY HISTORIAN

Dale Myers  
663-4370

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF  
DECATUR COUNTY, INC.  
P.O. BOX 163  
GREENSBURG, INDIANA 47240

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Greensburg, IN. 47240

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Mr. & Mrs. Shel Smith  
518 North East St.  
Greensburg, IN 47240



/THE BULLETIN/

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DECATUR COUNTY

Vol. 5 , No. 114

Greensburg, Indiana

April 1988

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Mary Lou Richards  
William Hellmich  
Mrs. L.L. Ketchum - Arizona  
James E. Siefert - Arizona  
Mrs. Neil (Greta) Solgere  
Melanie Maxwell  
Mr. & Mrs. Don McKinney  
Robert G. Beeson  
Gordon Smiley  
Mr. & Mrs. Paul Harrison  
June Reed  
Mr. & Mrs. James Biddle  
Donald Eubank  
Mr. & Mrs. Lester Gay  
Betty Bogucki - California  
Mrs. Robert J. (Martha Lou)  
Kuchler - New Jersey  
Mr. & Mrs. Bill Froeber

LIFE MEMBERS

Robert H. Richardson  
Mr. & Mrs. Everett Wonn  
Paul Pank  
Janet Armbrust  
Mrs. Gordon Springmier

GIFTS

Mr. & Mrs. Frank Townsend  
Florine Tillson  
Eva Ercil Williams  
Robert L. Meek, Sr.

MEMORIALS

In Memory of: Clifford Zetterberg  
by Doris Zetterberg  
In Memory of: Margaret Quantz by  
Mr. & Mrs. Lewis Loyd

THE 29th. ANNUAL DINNER MEETING

was held the evening of Jan. 23rd.  
at the Greensburg Presbyterian  
Church with some 115 members  
present. After a fine dinner  
served by the ladies of the  
church, a program entitled  
"Mountain Men" was presented by  
Victor Fields of Columbus. It  
was delivered in the vernacular  
of the old timers along with the  
tobacco chewing of the time.

All were well entertained. In  
the business meeting all the old  
officers were re-elected but for  
these exceptions: Maurice Keith,  
Treasurer, Diana Swegman, Direc-  
tor. A quite enjoyable evening.  
Allan Beall was in charge of the  
program with Morgan Miers very  
capably conducting the meeting.

SOCIETY'S THANKS goes to Ruth  
McClintic and Steve Stradley  
for their faithful work as  
treasurer and director of the  
organization during the past  
several years. Thanks so much.

OCCASION: Spring Meeting

DATE: Sunday, May 1, 1988.  
1:00 P.M. at the North  
side of the Courthouse  
Square.

PROGRAM: The local historical  
society is lucky to have a mem-  
ber, Melaine Maxwell, who works  
at the Indiana State Museum in  
Indianapolis. Melaine has  
volunteered to give the Society  
a personally conducted tour of  
the Museum. This will be an  
unusual opportunity for the  
members to visit a top museum,  
and learn a lot about the his-  
tory of Indiana. Busses will  
leave from the square on the  
above mentioned date & time.  
You are also free to travel in  
your own conveyance if it so  
pleases you. Bus riders will  
be charged a slight fee of \$3.00  
for their transportation, but  
just think, you will have no  
worries of driving, parking, etc.  
See you there, 202 N. Alabama,  
Indianapolis. Call Marge Hunter  
or any director to reserve.

DUES - Have you paid your dues  
for the year of 1988? Just send  
\$5.00 to Peg Miller, P.O. Box 163  
Greensburg, IN. We thank you.

HISTORY BOOKS - The Society has several Decatur County History Books of 1984 for sale. These books make wonderful presents, and everyone from this community should have one as a keepsake. The price is only \$50, quite a bargain for this product. Better get in.

### BOUNDARIES OF INDIANA

The boundaries of Indiana were drawn with the passage of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and finalized with the enabling acts when Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana entered the Union. In general, the then northwest shore of the Ohio River along the low-water mark of 1792 became the southern boundary. The eastern border of the state resulted from the enabling act for Ohio which drew that state's western boundary as a line extending due north from the mouth of the Great Miami River. The Indiana Enabling Act provided that the western boundary would be a line extending along the middle of the Wabash River from its mouth to a point where a line drawn due north from the town of Vincennes (the Vincennes Meridian) would last meet the northwestern bank, and then run due north until its intersection with the northern boundary. Indiana's northern border was described as an east-west line extending through a point ten miles north of the southern extremity of Lake Michigan. Indiana thus became a state of 36,291 square miles, located at about 40° N latitude and 86° W longitude in the eastern half of the 48 coterminus states. It is 38th in land area among the 50 states.

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EXCERPTS from Decatur County Independent Telephone Co. Book, March 1905 under instructions for proper use of telephone.

In Town-take receiver off of the hook, place it to the ear and wait until operator answers. Place the lips within one inch of mouth piece and speak in an undertone voice the number desired. Should you desire the attention of the operator, move the switch up and down 2 or 3 times slowly. This will attract her attention.

In the Country-take the receiver off the hook, see if anyone is talking. If not, hang up and give the crank one quick turn; then take down the receiver and wait until the operator answers. Place the lips 1 inch from the mouth piece and speak in an undertone voice the number desired. When through talking always ring off, so as to give disconnect signal. This is very important.

Operators are instructed to disconnect parties talking on party lines over 5 minutes. Kindly adhere to this rule as others desire to use the line.

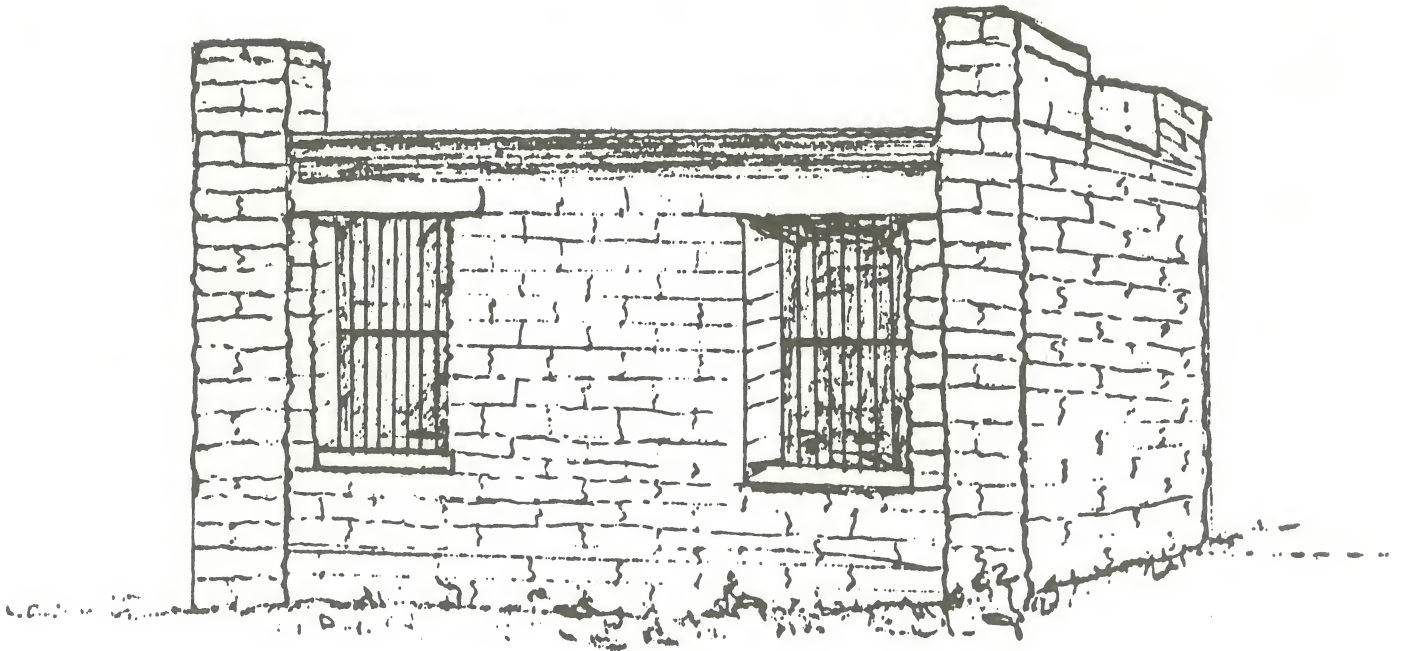
A suggestion to ladies on Party lines. Between the hours of 5:00 & 6:30 AM 11:30 - 12:30 Noon, and 6:30 to 7:30 PM do not use the telephone except on business, permitting the men to transact their business which is important.

< < < < < < < > > > > > > >

Stop and Think about the things you are doing today, for that will be our history 100 years from now.

From: Ripley County Historical Newsletter





THE NEWPOINT JAILHOUSE IN 1920 (April-11)

This sketch was drawn from a picture taken in 1920. Harding's History of Decatur County published in 1915 mentions - that a stone Jail was located in NewPoint, next to the fire engine house. The date of the erection of this jail cannot be presently determined. NewPoint must have experienced a growth period about 1906, when the second railroad track was installed. That same year the First National Bank was built in NewPoint.

My memory goes back to the "Big Fire" of 1909 when the center of town was burned out. The manuel operated pumper fire engine was in use at that time, pumping water from the street cistern onto the fire. I cannot remember if the jail was there at that time.

This jail was built of native limestone, no doubt from the local quarry. Possibly it was built with the idea in mind that it would be a warning to those who might be inclined to become unruly, mischiveous or intoxicated. Anyone spending a night in the jail, where all the comforts of home were not available might not want to do so again.

The jail did finally get a permanent occupant - the Phone Company installed the first automatic dial system in the County inside its door, where it remained until a new building was erected for that purpose, during the 1940's.

Finally, the old jail house was torn down, and now there remains only the memory and possibly a few old forgotten pictures among our souvenirs.

Raymond Carr  
2-24 1988

Items from the STANDARD

September 26, 1879

Rock Creek. An aged lady named Twaddle was burned to death last week near here. Her clothes caught fire from a pipe she was smoking.

Westport. Last Friday Jack Dearmond's team ran away bursting two barrels of whisky for Proctor and wrecking the wagon. As of the 20th, the horses were still missing.

St. Paul. Mrs. John Palmerton was sitting at the sewing machine in front of a window when a "thoughtless boy" fired a revolver. The bullet went through the window narrowly missing Mrs. Palmerton, struck the opposite wall and bounced back across the room.

October 3, 1879

Greensburg. Obituary of Rachel Talbott, daughter of Henry H. and Eliza Talbott. She was born in Greensburg May 15, 1825, and died September 26, 1879. She joined the M.E. Church in Greensburg in 1847. "A sufferer for many years....." (The previous issue says she died at the home of W.S. Woodfill.)

Clarksburg. The Christian Church had reopened following repairs and remodeling. The work had cost \$500, with \$100 still unpaid. A subscription taken at the first service raised \$130. The reporter commented on a part of the sermon having to do with church and state. The preacher was against Bible reading in the public schools and had no sympathy for the movement for "putting God in the Constitution." This position, said the reporter, did not represent the typical view. Two ministers, Elders Conner and McGarvey, had conducted the service, but we are not told which one preached. (This is a long article containing historical material.)

1879, various dates.

Westport. A little son of Alfred M. Scripture was bitten on the leg by a snake believed to be a black viper. Dr. Burroughs was called and "administered whisky freely." At last report the child was improving.

Salt Creek Twp. "There must be some attraction east of here as the hand car goes that way nearly every Sunday, loaded with passengers." John Clark was visiting his old home in England. His father was still living and "nearly as spry as a man of forty years." John was not well and wished to come home as soon as possible.

Milford. Census of the place: Doctors, 3; drunkards, 3; preachers, 3; fighting men, 3; school teachers, 3; saloons, 2.

May 29, 1885

Vice President Hendricks passed through Greensburg on Friday, "but nobody seemed to notice it."



In her commencement essay, "The Power of One Idea, " Miss Mary Bonner stated that the greatest success comes from adhering to one idea. As an example she cited Lydia Pinkham.

J.K. Ewing had distinguished himself by shedding his moustache, June 5, 1885.

"The song of the locust is now heard in the land."

" The Fourth of July comes on Saturday this year."

The Decatur County and South Park Cemeteries had been consolidated and the price of lots fixed by the directors. Lots for sale at Grover's Drug Store.

The performance of "The Hoosier School Master" on Wednesday evening was poorly attended. (Those folks just didn't know how to do it!) The receipts were a little more than the expenses.

The Clinton Twp. school house case would be heard "tomorrow" in the commissioners' court.

Forest Hill. "Pitching horseshoes is the present pastime for the loafers."

December 25, 1885

Holiday note: "To get rid of that "Too much turkey" take one of Rinehart's Pills--one a dose."

Submitted by: Anna J. Foley

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#### THE DECATUR COUNTY SQUARE

If I may, I would like to make a few remarks on our Decatur County Square. I probably should have said the Tower Tree Square but to me it will always be the county square or just the square.

In 1821, a deed for 100 acres of land, which was known as the original plot of the town of Greensburg, was surveyed off in lots and streets with a county square in the center. Lots were put up for sale and Greensburg was on its way.

In 1825, the Commissioners drafted a plan for a courthouse to be built in the center of the square. This was used until 1854 when it was condemned, demolished and a new courthouse built. It was completed in 1856 at a final cost of \$120,000, including the iron fence, leveling the yard and a chain hitch rack and cast iron watering troughs for the horses. For a complete story on the Courthouse see page 77 of Harding's 1915 history.

W.W. Lowe of the St. Paul quarries received the contract for the stone work. I have always admired the beautiful hand carving, especially the finial on the top of the tower. Henry Talbot and R.B. Thompson were the brick contractors.

The Commissioners secured the services of Edwin May, a noted architect from Madison, Indiana, whose results have received

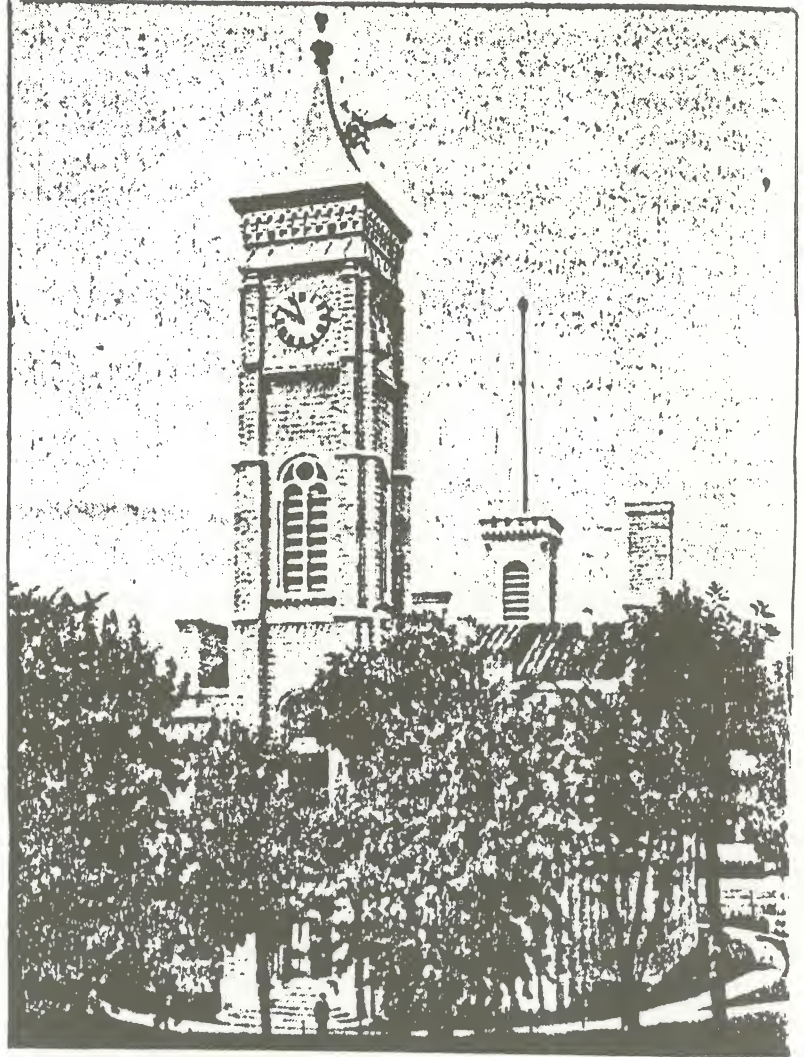
much acclaim, many noted people referring to our courthouse as a real gem. Born in Greensburg in 1895, and my father having an office on the square since 1892, I grew up familiar with the business around the square. Several excellent, informative articles have been written on this subject but for changes in proprietors, none can be permanent.

Over the years, I have viewed many courthouses and county squares, and I long ago decided we had the perfect one. Our beautiful courthouse topped off by our famous tree, surrounded by buildings on all four sided, extending down the side streets, instead of a long street or two with a courthouse mixed in somewhere. Right or wrong, I lost a lot of interest in the square on the removal of the trees around the courthouse. As a nature lover I miss those old oak, maple, ash and basswood trees, even Phil Scriptures sycamore tree which was a legend in itself. It did eliminate the bird problem, also the squirrels which several people fed regularly with some eating out of their hands.

At one time a tall iron fence, with gates on four sided to keep out stray livestock, chickens and geese was erected. The 1882 atlas shows this. Willand Martin salvaged some of this fence from a North Vernon Junk Yard, cut it down in height and placed it around his home on the Vandalia Road west of Greensburg, now owned by the Corya family.

At one time, a few years ago, a movement was started to abandon the courthouse, demolish it and build a new one away from the square. Due to the vigorous opposition of many interested citizens it was placed on the list of National Land Marks and our commissioners decided not to raze but to restore, and I want to say they did a wonderful job.

The following article, one of the best I have read on the history of the tree, was published in the Greensburg Daily News. I can find no name signed to it so I can not thank the writer.



**The Decatur County Courthouse in the 1950s.**

Submitted by: William Parker  
July, 1987



Early American settlers depended on trees for many things, including firewood and building material. Greensburg has also come to depend on a tree; specifically, a large-tooth aspen growing from the top of the courthouse tower.

The trees have grown from the top for generations and have made Greensburg well-known. The town is known as the "Tree City."

The tree has become the city's symbol. Even local businesses and organizations have gotten in the act, incorporating Tree City into their names and using drawings of the tower and tree in logos.

The aspens have been featured in magazines and newspapers all over the world, including the London Times. Visitors from all parts of the United States and the world have marvelled at the trees. The first sprout was discovered in 1871 about 10 years after the courthouse was built. An unknown person saw it while looking through a spy glass. At 110 feet above the pavement with its roots in crevices between limestone blocks, the first tree was grubbed out because officials feared it would damage the tower. However, the first tree was quickly replaced with a second tree in 1875, on the northeast corner.

By 1888, eight trees existed atop the 115-foot tower and all but two were removed. Soon after, one of the two died, leaving the second all alone on the tower. The ninth tree was discovered in 1929 on the southeast corner, followed by a tenth on the southwest corner. The tenth came down in 1949, but the ninth survived until 1958, when it was removed, still living, because its size worried county officials.

Steeplejack A.H. Winders discovered the present tree, the 11th, on the southwest corner in 1953. A 12th tree, which sprang up on the northeast corner in 1958 was removed in the late 1960's. The tree was very low on the tower and might eventually cause damage. Since the tree's discovery, Greensburg has wavered between admiring the aspens and worrying about the tower.

Although speculation abounds, the tree's origin remains a mystery. The most popular and widely accepted theory is that either the wind or a bird carried the seed up the tower. Questions have also been raised about what nourished the tree. The answer could be no one knows and no one will ever know. Meanwhile, theories float back and forth, including the one that it lives on dust from inside the tower and moisture from the air.

And of course, the tree is the source of at least one joke: Where does the tree get its water? From the springs on the clock.

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